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SUBJECT: CROATIAN PM SANADER HAS POSITIVE UK VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) PM Ivo Sanader's July 18 meeting with British PM Tony Blair during his first official visit to London received wide coverage in the Croatian press. The media focused on Blair's strong support of Croatia's EU accession and his statement that "there is no sense that Croatia has to wait for other countries." Sanader said his visit to the UK was a very important event for bilateral relations and for Croatia's negotiations for EU and NATO accession. Sanader told the press that the GoC was committed to playing a leadership role in the region and would help Serbia cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. Sanader said he intends to discuss this with Serbian PM Vojislav Kostunica when he visits Belgrade July 21.

¶2. (C) UK Ambassador John Ramsden confirmed the positive nature of the Sanader/Blair bilateral during a July 20 meeting with the Ambassador. Blair had noted to Sanader that all EU member states were in agreement on the need for candidate countries to fulfill all benchmarks prior to final agreement on EU accession; this would avoid in the future the problem the EU was now having with Bulgaria and Romania. It was important not to give EU member states who are reluctant to expand further any hook on which to hang their opposition. Sanader said he understood, and agreed; Croatia would fulfill all conditions established by the EU.

¶3. (C) Blair also emphasized to Sanader the need for all regional countries to have a European perspective; it was important for Croatia to keep working with Serbia, Albania, etc., so they keep advancing toward an EU future as well. Sanader agreed entirely, according to Ramsden, noting that he would be visiting Belgrade later the same week to keep up the Croatian/Serbian dialogue. Blair asked Sanader to tell PM Kostunica that he must lead his public forward on ICTY and regional issues; then, the EU will respond positively.

¶4. (C) Comment: With a successful visit to PM Blair under his belt, as well as a series of positive meetings with his EU and regional partners, Sanader and the Croatian press will attach even more importance to an invitation to visit Washington and meet President Bush, the one remaining major Euro-Atlantic leader who has not yet received him.

BRADTKE